



NASMDA

North American
Sikh Medical and Dental
Association

May 12, 2020

Dear Colleagues and fellow Sikh Community Members,

Waheguru ji ka Khalsa, Waheguru ji ki Fateh!

It has come to our attention that many are discussing the decision of a [Canadian Sikh doctor](#) and his brother choosing to shave their beards in order to wear certain personal protective equipment (PPE). As fellow Sikh providers who are also facing this pandemic, we are deeply saddened to learn of anyone who feels like they must make this false choice and that they are not in a position to practice their faith fearlessly. We are not in contact with this doctor, nor do we have any firsthand knowledge of how either he or his brother came about their decisions, and thus we do not wish to make judgements on what led to their specific actions. What we do know is that that one individual's personal decision does not and should not impact what any other Sikh healthcare professional does when faced with challenges to their articles of faith.

As Sikhs, we consider our *kesh* to be a divine gift. Keeping our hair uncut is an essential part of the Sikh way of life and our identity. Our expectation should always be that our religious requirements will be permitted regardless of our profession. We formed [the North American Sikh Medical and Dental Association \(NASMDA\)](#) 27 years ago to better support and protect each other from precisely these sorts of challenges, including obstacles pertaining to our religious beliefs in the workplace and our ongoing professional needs. Through our global membership, we know there are countless Sikh healthcare professionals practicing with their articles of faith intact. We know that these providers are committed both to their religious beliefs and their simultaneous desire to serve their communities with honor and integrity. As such, we want all of our members and those beyond to know that we are here as a resource for anyone who is struggling with adequate PPE provisions, or facing adverse policies regarding the allowance of facial hair.

We have partnered with the Sikh Coalition in the U.S. and the World Sikh Organization in Canada; both of whose legal teams provide free legal resources and aid to Sikhs who face religious discrimination in the U.S. and Canadian workplace. Their attorneys are ready to confidentially speak with anyone who is worried that they may have to compromise their religious beliefs. Additionally, the Sikh Coalition has released a [Healthcare Professionals Guide](#), while the World Sikh Organization has released the [Sikh Health Care Workers COVID-19 Related PPE Accommodation](#) document both of which outline current challenges and steps that we can take to better protect ourselves in obtaining PPE, such as PAPRs and CAPRs which



NASMDA

North American
Sikh Medical and Dental
Association

provide full coverage regardless of facial hair. We know that the international PPE shortage also means there are less PAPRs available, however Sikh Coalition and WSO attorneys are also able to discuss various methods of protection using more easily accessible PPE as well.

Finally, we are offering NASMDA's support through these trying times as a forum where healthcare professionals across the world can come to discuss their difficulties and challenges. We encourage those of you who are struggling to reach out immediately. We also want to celebrate how so many of our members have been able to find workable solutions to make their PPE fit properly so they can continue providing medical care while maintaining their facial hair. We are collecting pictures and videos of these solutions to pass on to the community in case those methods work for others, so please share what's worked for you with us. It is our goal to inform and ensure that all of our community members understand they have options and rights. In the spirit of Sikhi, please know that, as you navigate these unprecedented times and feel the different pressures that come with our profession, you are not alone.

As Sikhs, we are in this together. Though the path may seem difficult right now, we have faced far greater threats in our history. Inspired by our Gurus' lives and teachings, we will continue to meet these challenges and persevere.

Chardi Kala,

NASMDA Executive Committee